

Chapter 12

Offensive Tactics

12001. Tactics in Cold Weather

The science and art of tactical operations in a CWE differs little from other environments. Still, historical lessons of winter warfare reveal that cold weather combat is oftentimes decided more by environmental factors than actual combat with enemy forces. Victory is still achieved by defeating the enemy; however, the cold weather introduces unique opportunities for attacking the enemy “system.” Advantage is gained by avoiding the enemy’s strengths and attacking his vulnerabilities. The example below is derived from the “Winter War” between Soviet and Finnish forces at the outset of World War II, and details how Finnish small-units applied maneuver tactics in a CWE:

Finnish tactics aim to separate the enemy’s strong points from each other and to encircle them. In this manner, the famous “mottis”, or an encircled enemy center of resistance, was formed. The fighting of the “mottis” clearly represented an attempt to starve the enemy into surrender.¹

This Finnish tactic demonstrates that victory is not always accomplished by destruction of all enemy units, rather, by topping his will to fight. Following are considerations which small-unit leaders must take prior to projecting offensive combat power.

- a. **Terrain.** Terrain is analyzed from the perspective of making it an advantage to friendly units and a disadvantage to enemy. Generally speaking, mountainous country where there are high ridges and plateaus cut by deep valleys is best suited to mobile, small-unit operations. Larger units and vehicle convoys will be channelized in this terrain and become more vulnerable targets. Flexibility in snow-covered terrain is increased if Marines are ski and snowshoe trained. Helicopters help to overcome the mobility problem and provide rapid deployment of troops when road routes are dominated by enemy.
- b. **Main Supply Routes (MSRs).** Existing lines of communication must be controlled to assure success in winter operations. Breaches in enemy lines of communication should be made near dominating terrain if retention of the area is required. Severe winter weather hastens enemy destruction after supply lines are cut.
- c. **Weather.** Use weather conditions to increase opportunities for surprise attacks. Exploit falling snow, blizzards, fogs, low cloud cover and natural night illumination. Imaginative use of weather obstacles may turn them into major advantages. Conducting offensive operations during severe weather conditions, however, restricts aviation support and increases control and reconnaissance problems. Furthermore, harsh weather requires that Marines train in a similar environment in order to gain confidence in their ability to operate equipment and employ weapons.
- d. **Surprise.** Reduced visibility in a CWE increases the ability to attack with surprise. The combination of terrain, MSRs and weather may lead an enemy in a defensive posture to consider a particular route “no-go” and weakly secure it. However, this allows the Marine small-unit leader, with proper mobility, marksmanship and communications training, to strike into the enemy’s weak point.

12002. Battle Drills

Battle drills should be established at company and platoon levels since the difficulties in command and control and the uncertainties of cold weather operations require initiative at all levels. Battle drills for each unit will encompass routines for march discipline as well as actions on contact with the enemy.

- a. **Actions During March/Halts.** Proper march discipline increases the unit's survivability in many aspects. Schedule frequent but short rest halts, thus preventing sweat-drenched Marines from freezing. During halts, minimize the amount of movement outside of the march tracks; packs will typically be dropped to the rear of each Marine, facilitating the ability to sit on an insulated item. Security measures are enforced, alternating inboard and outboard fields of fire. Ensure the buddy system is employed to conduct frostbite checks during halts.
- b. **Actions on Contact.** Preparing for counter-ambush begins with drills that rehearse transitioning from traveling to assault mode (this may involve dismounting skis, snowshoes, BVs skijoring, etc).
- c. **Actions at Assault Position.** While many offensive operations may require an "assault position", the preparations which follow do not always apply. Drills should be considered for: establishing security; erecting warming tents; staging gear and transitioning to assault over-the-snow mode. Fire and movement is still executed in the assault, however, with deep snow packs, shorter movement distances are required.

12003. Orders

The process of issuing warning orders, fragmentary orders and detailed operations orders does not change in a CWE. The unique aspects of cold weather, however, require that more time be allowed to accomplish small unit preparations. Everything takes longer in the cold. In order to ensure that Marines are responsive to orders, proper and timely use of warning orders provides the solution to this problem.

12004. Uniform and Equipment

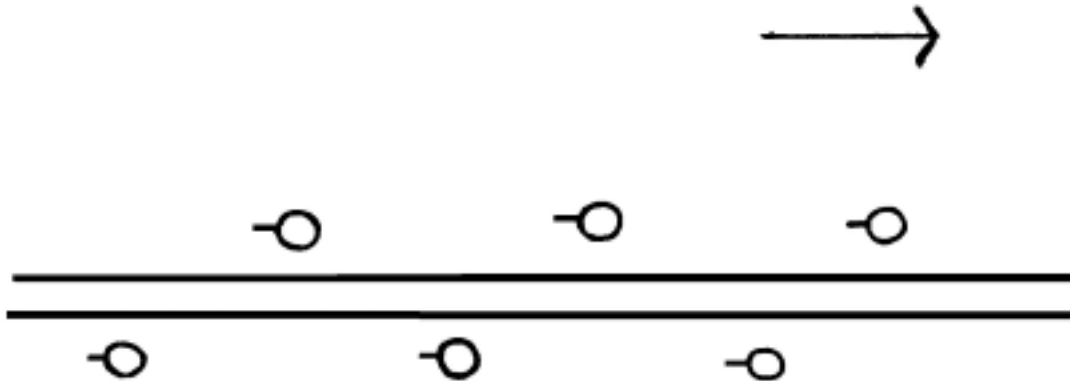
- a. **Uniform.** Detailed in the commander's orders, the uniform should be as light as possible, consistent with the weather. A good rule of thumb is to ensure Marines dress "comfortably cool." Experienced men should decide the amount of underclothing to be worn; the unit commander for purposes of identification, camouflage and uniformity, however, selects the outer camouflaged layer. Wearing camouflage must be preplanned and detailed, and adjustments may be made during the march (to respond to changing terrain and weather.)
- b. **Equipment.** The equipment carried varies with mission, weather and duration of operation. At a minimum each Marine must be equipped for three functions: surviving the cold, accomplishing the primary mission and being prepared for on-order missions. (see 8003.)

12005. Track Intelligence

Units on the tactical march must immediately analyze ski and snowshoe tracks for their intelligence value.

- a. **Unit Size Estimation.** Although there is no exact method to determine actual unit size, ski pole basket marks provide the best indicator. Be aware that skiborne troops moving downhill plant their poles less frequently than on flat-ground, and increase their pole plants while moving uphill.
 - Up to Squad – it is possible to distinguish and count individual basket marks. The track is generally clean and straight. It is possible to identify multiple ski/snowshoe tracks.
 - Up to Platoon – if on skis, basket marks are difficult to distinguish from each other and may look like a small ditch. The track is somewhat clean and straight, but may be a half-a-width wider than normal (i.e., 3 ski tracks or 3 snowshoe tracks wide.)
 - Platoon to Company – track is sloppy and wide, possibly 2-3 times wider than normal. The edges of the track are destroyed at bends and curves.
- b. **Unit Direction.** Once again, the ski pole basket mark reveals the general direction traveled by the unit being tracked. As the ski pole is planted and the ski moves forward, the basket will angle

forward, causing the basket to dig into the snow, and leaving an indent on the forward edge (thus indicating direction.) Also, the point of the pole will contact the snow before the pole is planted, making a line pointing away from the direction of travel.



- **Disturbance** – whether skiborne or snowshoe mobile, snow disturbance provides evidence to help the tracker determine unit direction. All forward movement will displace snow forward. Snowshoes and skis will throw snow up and outwards in the direction of travel.

12006. Camouflage and Concealment

In snow-covered terrain the stark contrast between light and dark emphasizes any item which does not blend naturally with its surroundings. Furthermore, every movement by vehicles or dismounted troops leaves readily identifiable tracks in the snow which can provide detailed intelligence to an enemy. Also, backgrounds are not necessarily all white. Rocks, brush, trees and shadows make sharp contrast with the snow. It is essential that individual Marines understand these basic concepts in order to effectively camouflage themselves, their equipment and their vehicles.

- Individual Concealment.** A thorough reconnaissance and terrain analysis is required in order for the small-unit leader to proscribe proper camouflage patterns. By using a combination of green woodland and overwhite articles of clothing, four different color schemes can be used depending on terrain.
 - Thickly Wooded.** These areas consist mainly of secondary growth coniferous or deciduous trees with thick underbrush. An all green clothing combination is normally best.
 - Low Brush/Light Scrub** These areas are often found at and above the treeline or in hilly areas with poor soil. In most cases an open snow background predominates and a combination of with over green is usually suitable.
 - Forest.** These areas are covered with primary growth, coniferous and deciduous, of varying density, with little underbrush. The normal clothing combination here is green over white.
 - Above Treeline.** Even above the tree line, terrain is not solely white. Exposed rock and shadows change the view. Commanders should carefully observe the area. All-white camouflage is usually best. In areas of exposed rock, deep shadows or exposed brush, however, it may be best to roll up a leg or arm of the overwhites to provide for some contrast

- b. Weapons and Equipment.** Equipment is relatively easy to camouflage with good results being achieved by the use of matte white paint or white tape. Plastic, adhesive tape works best but should be applied in a warm environment, and when applied to weapons, should not interfere with the operating groups. Group equipment, such as sleds and tents, should be white, but will be camouflaged additionally based on background terrain. In wooded terrain, the area around the bivouac site can be improved by thickening it with branches; small trees or branches can also be suspended above the tents to break up the silhouette. In predominately snow covered terrain, tents and other large equipment must be dug in, then concealed by draping white camouflage netting over.
- c. Vehicles.** Vehicles should be prepared with matte paint in irregular patterns. Stationary vehicles should be dug into the snow, parked in a depression, or surrounded with a snow wall. When possible, vehicles should be parked so that their shadow falls on brush or another shadow, thus interrupting the straight lines of its own shadow. Exhaust plumes can be seen from miles away, the noise of an idling engine carries for great distances, and the infrared signature of a warm engine against the cold background is very great. In the absence of thermal blankets which minimize heat signatures, snow provides an excellent thermal barrier.

12007. Movement

- a. Scout Skiers.** Rifle companies and similarly sized support detachments should task organize their units with a dedicated element that represents its most mobile and highly trained Marines. These elements, referred to as scout skiers, may encompass from two to six fire-teams, and serve as a unit leader's personal reconnaissance element. Traditional tasks include:
- To scout terrain to a main body's front and flanks prior to movement, and to provide security throughout the movement's execution. (This information is delivered to the commander and often determines contact status and deployment formation.)
 - To provide reconnaissance as directed by commander's intent (for example, to locate suitable assembly areas, attack positions, probably line of deployment, release points, ice thickness, avalanche hazards, etc.)
- b. Far Flank Security** (referred to as "mountain picketing"). Combat reports from the 1979-1989 conflict between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan *mujahideen* rebels reveal several lessons regarding military operations in mountainous terrain. Offensive operations in Afghanistan oftentimes required the units to command adjacent ridgelines prior to "sweeping" a corridor of interest. Without forces on the dominating terrain, it was difficult to effectively observe or engage enemy units in the corridor.

Such mountainous terrain as was encountered by the Soviets in Afghanistan may prevent local flank security elements from providing the necessary protection. Mountain picketing is an expanded concept of the techniques of flank and all-around security. The mission of the mountain picket force is to prevent the enemy from bringing effective flanking fire or observation onto bear on the main body. Deploy mountain picket forces on high ground to protect the main body by domination of the high ground, by additional flank security and by linking units or subunits by observation and support fire when units are channeled into corridors by the nature of the terrain. Local flank security is fundamental to our tactics and familiar to all Marines; however, mountain pickets have distinct, additional advantages and disadvantages.

- **Advantages:** Mountain pickets overlooking the route provide the main element with increased security and constant coverage by supporting teams. While traveling along dominating ridgelines, these pickets are also more likely to maintain communication with fire support agencies, and are thus in the best position to direct fire support.
- **Disadvantages:** Mountain pickets will likely move through more arduous terrain than the main body, thus slowing the main body's rate of movement. Concealment is paramount as pickets

typically deploy above the treeline. Control and communication is difficult between main body and pickets due to physical separation and frequent lack of visual contact.

Pickets are particularly effective during “clearing” missions or other tasks that require a main body to physically travel a corridor. The pickets can travel slightly ahead of the main body and provide reconnaissance information to the main body. In defending the main body against ambush, frontal or flank attack, mountain pickets will have the best observation for directing fire support. Hence, attaching forward observers and FACs to the mountain picket could maximize fire support flexibility for the commander.

In order to effectively coordinate their movement, the main body must design a solid movement scheme of maneuver that uses checkpoints and phase lines. These coordinating measures assist not only in reporting procedures, but also for the commander to ensure that the movement of separate units is synchronized and controlled. Elements dispersed from the main body, such as far flank security, must have established priority of fires and conduct of fire nets in order to effectively coordinate fire support.

- c. **Track Discipline.** Movement in a snow-covered environment can be the Marine’s worst enemy if his unit does not understand track discipline. Tracks left in snow are quite visible to both ground and air assets for great distances.
 - Routes of advance should be concealed from air and ground observation, and can best take advantage of natural shadows by following the terrain contours.
 - Use of existing tracks is encouraged, minding the likelihood of ambush. Traveling in a previous unit’s tracks minimizes evidence of recent activity, and can work to help improve deception.

12008. ATTACK

Individual and small unit tactics will remain generally unchanged; the phases of an assault are the same, though the CWE requires specific considerations and unique techniques.

- a. **Assault Position.** If this control measure is used, it is usually the time at which the main body rejoins forces with scout skiers and the advance guard. Prior to the assault, warming tents may need to be established in order to dry clothing, prepare hot wets and care for casualties. Marines will typically drop unneeded equipment here; the assault load should be light, but must include survival equipment, shovels, sleeping mats, etc. Finally, units will transition to their assault mode of travel (ski, snowshoe, and foot.)
- b. **Assault.** In order to maximize surprise and speed, the assault should be timed to coincide with darkness, snowstorms, fog, etc. Indirect and direct fire support should be planned closer to the objective to compensate for the dampening effects afforded by snow and ice fortifications. Sleds, snowmobiles or other mobility assets must be planned for displacing firing assets closer to the enemy as the assault progresses. Similarly, reserve units must be kept closer to the main body as mobility in a CWE is drastically reduced. Ideally, the assault is conducted from high ground to low ground. Do not rely on aircraft for either assault support or close air support, as unpredictable weather severely limits their capabilities and dependability.
- c. **Consolidation.** Assaulting troops will be fatigued and must now be protected from becoming cold weather casualties. Priority is placed on establishing limited bivouac, either by erecting warming tents or temporarily using the enemy’s accommodations. This may require a tasked unit to return to the assault position for the purpose of bringing forward essential equipment (stoves, tents, etc.) Temporary occupation of the enemy’s positions is acceptable; however, counterattacks should be anticipated, as the enemy will likely fight to recover vital equipment he has abandoned during the fight./

ⁱ German Report Series, *Warfare in the Far North*, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1982) p. 19.